

Sen. Franken, Rep. Walz to Talk Improving Mental Health Care and Suicide Prevention with Veterans, Veteran's Family, and Veteran Advocates

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St. Paul, MN –U.S. Sen. Al Franken and U.S. Representative Tim Walz met with veterans, a veteran's family, and veteran advocates to talk about ways to improve mental health for veterans and stop the rash of suicides that now claims almost two dozen veterans every day.

The two lawmakers said an average of 22 veterans commit suicide each day. To help tackle this growing epidemic, Rep. Walz recently introduced bipartisan legislation in the House of Representatives that would take a comprehensive approach to reform and improve mental health care for our veterans and their families. The legislation was written in conjunction with and is supported by veteran service organizations such as the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) and the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW). Sen. Franken, a leading voice on improving mental health care, said he supports the House effort and is currently looking at ways to move forward with Senate legislation.

BACKGROUND ON HOUGHTALING FAMILY:

Adam Houghtaling, son of Curt and Heidi (Voss) Houghtaling was born on Aug. 21, 1984. The Houghtaling family has a rich history of serving our country and, from a young age, it was clear Adam cared deeply about his country. Following in his father's footsteps, at age 17 Adam enlisted in the Army National Guard to serve alongside his father. In 2003, the father-son pair deployed to Iraq together with the B Battery 1st Battalion, 147th Field Artillery unit of the South Dakota National Guard. After returning from Iraq in 2005, having spent over a year protecting our freedom in the desert, Adam worked as a recruiter for the South Dakota Army National Guard until he was re-deployed to Kuwait in 2009. After returning from his second deployment in 2010, Adam moved to Minneapolis to be closer to his family, which includes his two sisters, Melissa Houghtaling and Jessica Griffin.

Unbeknownst to many, despite his bright smile, SSG Adam Houghtaling came back from Iraq with a broken soul. His positive demeanor masked his internal struggles; Adam had a metal plate put in his neck from injuries he received while deployed and was diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress (PTS). While Adam loved his family deeply, the emotional pain became too great a burden to bear. On August 19th 2012, Adam took his own life just two days before his 28th birthday.

Adam's parents and sisters are now working to prevent another family from having to go through what they went through and have become suicide prevention and awareness advocates. They are meeting with Senator Franken and Representative Walz to talk about the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for America's Veterans (Clay Hunt SAV) Act, which Rep. Walz introduced earlier this summer. The bipartisan bill was written in conjunction with the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) and the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) and takes a comprehensive approach to reform and improve mental health care for veterans and their families.

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